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ABSTRACT

A policy statement on value-centered education is offered by the American Association of State Colleges and Universities (AASCU). Examples of different types of value-centered education are also identified. It is advocated that colleges provide more effective leadership in the areas of experience that prepare students to make future choices: personal, professional, and political. A key in responding to the needs of students lies in maintaining a strong emphasis upon the values traditionally associated with a liberal education and translating these into the contemporary setting. Curricula should be designed to acquaint students with the ways moral issues have been approached in the past, as well as how this knowledge can be applied to present and future dilemmas. Consideration should be given to developing university-wide interdisciplinary courses that emphasize universal ideas, along with expanded treatment of moral issues in specialized or professional programs. The university community can also be used as a forum for debate of moral issues, using visiting speakers, seminars, and colloquia. Examples of possible activities include: a course in environmental issues that relates ecology, society, and education; and an interdisciplinary course in human rights. (SW)

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AASCU

Value-Centered Education and Moral Commitment

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The following statement was developed by the AASCU Committee on Policies and Purposes and adopted by the AASCU membership during its 16th annual meeting, November 1976.

Introduction

"Education is what enables every man to judge for himself what secures or endangers freedom."

Thomas Jefferson

The teaching of moral precepts was a primary responsibility of the colleges founded early in our country's history. As these institutions developed a secular orientation, and as public colleges and universities were founded, instruction in ethics and morals became secondary to an education of scholarly and scientific pursuits and the acquisition of professional and vocational skills.

Recently, some educators have become concerned that moral and ethical judgments are an insular part of the learning experience; if examined at all, they are not an integral part of instruction in disciplines, such as the social sciences, government, the natural sciences, and the professions. Those concerned with the divergence between ethics and education do not propose a return to the catechistic instruction of the earlier colleges; however, they do believe that ethics and values must be more firmly addressed in the education of college students. Such was the concern of the members of the American Association of State Colleges and Universities when they voted to accept a policy statement on value-centered education.

The policy statement which follows is deliberately broad; it is not prescriptive. The AASCU membership realizes danger exists in stating policy on ethics, values, and moral commitment. The American academic tradition is based on inquiry, not doctrine. Yet, unhampered examination and experimentation with diverse philosophies and political and social systems does not preclude the existence of certain basic values—dignity, integrity, humanity, constancy, equality, aestheticism, among others—which can be incorporated into the examination itself.

The policy statement does not address specific values, nor does it prescribe how the values should be taught. An

appendix is included with the policy statement identifying examples which illustrate the various ways in which value-centered education may be approached.

Need For Leadership

It is imperative that institutions of higher learning provide more effective leadership in the experiences that prepare students to make their future choices: personal, professional, and political. Contemporary events in government, business, and politics, both international and national, have demonstrated that a code of expediency, not of ethics, is, if not prevalent, at least publicized to the extent that colleges and universities must question their past performances in making students aware of the moral issues which must be confronted in all enterprises.

The prior omission has had an impact upon the students who enter colleges and universities today. But, their cynicism toward authority is not a hindrance to the education process; rather it reflects their desire for a higher standard of conduct than they see in society. Students are responsive to the teaching of moral values which have marked civilizations throughout history.

The behavior of today's students is symbolic of their search for a moral standard. Some are outraged at the injustices and hypocrisies they perceive in the world around them and vocally express this in demonstrations. Some develop new lifestyles as a rejection of the materialism which characterizes society. Many are eager to volunteer and work in community service programs and with people whom they believe are victims of society.

The Role of Higher Education

Colleges and universities have a responsibility to educate the whole student, not just serve vocational and scholarly interests. This becomes more evident as the complexities of the post-industrial society increase and as the influences of international events draw the world into a global community. Decisions, judgments, and perceptions are not as clear as they once were; and the consequences of actions are more far-reaching. To function at the highest level possible, students will require knowledge, insight, and a foundation of values which have withstood the tests of history. Colleges and universities must anticipate

and examine the complexity of choices—professional, political, social—which will confront students in the future and must help them develop attitudes and commitments which will allow them not just to survive, but to live with satisfaction.

A key in responding to the needs of students lies in maintaining a strong emphasis upon the values traditionally associated with a liberal education and translating these into the contemporary setting. Further, institutions must guard against allowing education to be so structured that artificial barriers, vested academic interests, and compartmentalization prevent students from discovering the fundamental ideas and principles applicable to all disciplines.

Courses of Action

Curriculum should be designed to acquaint students with the ways in which man has grappled with the moral issues of the past, and should apply this knowledge to the dilemmas of the present and future. Within the traditional liberal arts fields, such as history, literature, philosophy, and religion, exist the foundations of the cultural and ethical heritage. The great ideas of the philosophers, such as truth, justice, liberty, honor, duty, wisdom, love, beauty, nature, and courage, cannot be isolated in one discipline; their applicability is universal.

Consideration should be given to the establishment of university-wide interdisciplinary courses which emphasize the universal ideas. Further, treatment of moral issues in specialized or professional programs needs to be expanded.

A matter of concern is the tremendous pressures on and within higher education that mitigate against this emphasis. The state of the economy and government priorities have increased competition for jobs, particularly among graduates in the liberal arts. This has resulted in skepticism as to the value of a liberal education, and has increased student interest in the more vocational and technical curriculums.

During the past 200 years, higher education has experienced cycles of emphasis involving classical, vocational, and scientific subjects. The technological developments of recent decades, coupled with the recessionary cycles, do pose a threat to the continuation and strengthening of the liberal arts in the college curriculum. However, the

threat is unnecessary. Liberal and vocational education are not incompatible, and can be balanced within a student's educational program. The ability to communicate with others, an awareness of one's own culture and an understanding of other cultures, an appreciation for human values, and an ability to relate and apply the major thoughts on human development, all developed through liberal education, are excellent preparation for any profession or career.

Further, there has been, and probably will continue to be, an increase in the time spent away from the place of work. The increase in personal or leisure time means that students who are permitted to study only vocational or technical curricula are being educated to live only half, or less, of their lives, and may have difficulty constructing a satisfactory existence for the remainder of their time.

Commitment

Higher education faculties must respond to the moral requirements of students. They must assume the responsibility of developing a curriculum that is value-centered; that prepares students for the moral issues that will confront them in the complex world in which they will live out their lives.

This may require a restructuring of course material, a reorganization of some disciplines to include value-centered study, and greater cooperation among faculty in various disciplines.

An additional measure involves the use of a university community as a forum for the debate of moral issues, utilizing visiting speakers, seminars, and colloquia. The opportunity for students to be involved in discussions of current controversies and to hear expressed a wide spectrum of opinions is a great step towards understanding moral dilemmas and the values involved.

Further, a total commitment is required by the academic community to set a moral and ethical tone by example. Values are more easily taught when they can be emulated. Discrepancies between classroom theory and the actual behavior of the academic community can only reinforce the cynicism of college students. Faculty and administrators that are responsive to the moral awareness of students can meet the challenge of instilling the strength of character needed to benefit the world of the future.

Appendix

The following are only a few of the possible activities and programs which reinforce value-centered education. The examples, actual programs conducted in AASCU institutions, represent a range of possibilities.

—A "People Project" on human values and public power: the land, the government, and the people. A series of discussions with scholars and other humanists who examine possible decisions of public agencies in terms of their effects on human values.

—An Institute for Ethnic Studies which offers a sequence of courses to provide greater insight into America's history and culture and the way in which immigrants from different cultures interacted to form the present society.

—"Food for a Small Planet," a course which examines the world food situation, including limiting factors such as politics, economics, and weather, and attempts to formulate solutions.

—A course in environmental issues which relates ecology, society, and education.

—A course in "The Sociology of the Future" which attempts to make students aware of the rapid changes in society and the need for development of constructive alternatives in work and leisure.

—"Arts and Ideas," a program of courses designed to give students a clearer understanding of the breadth and diversity of western culture. The program explores the relationship of development in scientific thought, political and intellectual history, and movements in literature, art, architecture, and music within given historical periods.

—A series of interdisciplinary humanities modules centering on major cultural epochs. The modules integrate the social, intellectual, and artistic achievements of man during unique periods of history.

—A freshmen year full-time program of five segments, each planned as an integrated package of living/learning experience, and each centered on a particular historical epoch thought to illuminate fundamental human issues regarding conflict and change. Students are guided in reconstructuring the past in its private and public dimensions, studying relationships between high culture and folk culture, between public and personal values, be-

tween society and its artifacts and ideas, and between emotion and intellect in the mental structure of an age.

—An interdisciplinary course in human rights which includes an examination of international systems for the protection of human rights, the right to life, and racial and sexual equality. The course, which interrelates the fields of history, literature, and philosophy, also examines political and economic rights, and freedom of expression.

AASCU is an organization of 323 state colleges and universities which enroll 25 percent of the total national student population, and 30 percent of the baccalaureate students.

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